



Texas Department of Health El Paso County Metals Survey Health Consultation Summary Fact Sheet - July 2002

The Texas Department of Health (TDH) recently evaluated the public health significance of arsenic and lead found in surface soil samples from 191 various locations in El Paso. Areas included residential yards, schools, parks, day-care facilities, apartment complexes, playground areas, community centers, and churches.

TDH concluded that exposure to contaminated soils in some areas where arsenic was found above 20 mg/kg or lead was found above 500 mg/kg could pose an unacceptable public health hazard to children. When contaminants get into soil, the most common way to be exposed is by ingesting the contaminated soil.

Pre-school aged children are more likely to play in dirt and place their hands and other dirty objects in their mouths. The amount of soil that a child eats, how often he/she eats the soil, and the average concentration of the contaminant in the soil are some of the important factors in determining whether ingesting the soil could affect the child's health. Some steps you can take to reduce exposure to arsenic and lead in soil are shown in the adjacent boxes.

The Texas Department of Health Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program recommends that ALL children have their blood tested for lead at ages 1 and 2.

How can I reduce my family's exposure to arsenic and lead?

- U** Avoid serving foods in areas with contaminated soil.
- U** Wash hands and face thoroughly after working or playing in soil.
- U** Wash toys, pacifiers, and other items that go into children's mouths often.
- U** Remove work and play shoes before entering the house.
- U** Damp-mop floors and wipe down counters, tables, and window ledges regularly.
- U** Wash soil-laden clothes separately from other clothes.
- U** Cover bare soils with grass or other materials.

How can I reduce exposure to arsenic and lead while I garden?

- U** Use a raised bed with clean soil for gardening.
- U** Wear gloves.
- U** Consider wearing a mask if you spend time in dusty soils.
- U** Add clean soils such as compost or mulch to your existing garden.
- U** Dampen soils with water before you garden to limit the amount of dust you inhale.
- U** Wash all vegetables carefully to remove all dirt.

**For more information, call:
El Paso City/County Health Department at 1-915-543-3525
or the Texas Department of Health at 1-800-588-1248**